

Calef-Staples House

HABS No. ALA-51

An-addendum to  
Staples House  
1614 Old Shell Road  
Mobile  
Mobile County  
Alabama

HABS  
ALA,  
49-MOBI,  
52-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

CALEF -

THE STAPLES PLACE.  
1614<sup>A</sup> Old Shell Road.  
Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama.

HABS  
ALA,  
49-MOBI,  
52-

Ownership:

Present Owner: Mrs. N. A. Staples.

Previous Owners: Antonio Espejo.  
Richard Tankersley.  
W. I. Ingersoll.  
Anthony Espejo.  
Abraham B. Homer.  
Charles E. Scoville.  
Joel A. Roberts.  
Mary Jane Calif.  
William J. Thornton.  
Dora D. Staples.(Mrs. N. A. Staples)

Date of Erection: 1852 - 1853.

Architect: Unknown.

Builder: John F. Calif.

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: Two.

Materials of Construction: Two story frame; wood shingle roof; brick foundation; two story porch with wooden balustrade in between columns.

Other Existing Records:

Source of Material: Records of the Probate Court of Mobile County  
Research by Jesse W. Phillips, Mobile, Ala.

Compiled by: Katherine Floyd, Auburn, Ala.

Approved: E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer, HABS  
5/12/1937

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Additional Data: This house stands in the center of a plot of land consisting of ten acres and was originally a part of a Spanish grant to Antonio Espejo in 1790.

Henry Stickney bought the land November 27, 1820 from Anthony Espejo, Richard Tankersley and W. I. Ingersoll, heirs of Anthony Espejo.

Abraham B. Homer purchased it from Henry Stickney, February 4, 1832. (Homer built a home here and lived in it, but it disappeared).

Charles E. Scoville acquired the property April 4, 1842, and shortly after built a home thereon which was destroyed by fire three years later.

On June 6, 1851, Elliott W. Gregory acting as attorney in fact for Charles E. Scoville, sold the property to Joel A. Roberts and a deed was issued and recorded by Scoville confirming the sale in April of the same year.

Mary Jane Calef, wife of John F. Calif a prominent local business man of the time, became the owner by purchase, August 9, 1852 and immediately thereafter built the home which is the subject of this history.

William J. Thornton bought the house and land September 23, 1887 and sold to Dora D. Staples (Mrs. N. A. Staples) May 21, 1901. The property is still owned and occupied by Mrs. Staples.

Alterations: The original inclosed stair in hall, first story, removed in recent years and a new modern stair installed. The kitchen was originally apart from the house, it has been moved up to the house and joined thereto, other changes were made on the rear such as bath room additions etc.,.

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

HABS No. ALA-51

## CALEF-STAPLES HOUSE

ALA

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An addendum to Staples House  
1614 Old Shell Road  
Mobile, Alabama  
in HABS Catalog (1941)

Location: 1614 Old Shell Road, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama  
Geographic Location Code: 01-2100-097

Present Owner: Jessie Staples Kimbrough

Present Occupant: Charles M. Bancroft

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: This house is a fine example of the "Creole Cottage", and remains substantially as it was originally built.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1852
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: The land upon which the existing house stands was originally part of the Espejo land grant. On April 4, 1842, Charles Scoville acquired this parcel of land and erected his residence there. In 1845, this house was partially destroyed by fire and Scoville sold the property in 1851 to Joel A. Roberts. The property was sold again in 1852 to Mary Jane Calef, the wife of John F. Calef, Commission Merchant, who constructed the existing structure as a dwelling in that year. The following chain of title was extracted from the deed books of the Probate Court Record Division, Mobile County.

1852 Deed August 9, 1852 in Book 5 page 184  
Joel A. Roberts  
to  
Mary Jane Calef  
(\$3,700)

1888 Deed March 27, 1888 in Book 58 page 111  
John F. Calef  
to  
James W. Monette  
(\$3,000.)

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1901 Deed May 21, 1901 in Book 95 page 446  
William J. Thornton  
to  
Dora D. Staples

1951 Deed February 24, 1951 in Book 109 page 368  
Dora D. Staples  
to  
Norma A. Staples

1965 Deed October 12, 1965 in Book 630 page 320  
Norma A. Staples  
to  
Jessie Staples Kimbrough

4. Builder or contractor: Unknown

5. Alterations and additions: The present owner has in her possession drawings dated August 23, 1923 for proposed major alterations by C.L. Hutchinson, architect. Most of the plan was never effected, but the original enclosed stairway in the hall was partially replaced, the old separate kitchen was moved and joined to the rear of the house, a plastered arch was added in the hallway, concrete steps to the entrance replaced the original wooden ones, and minor alterations were made on the rear with the addition of a bathroom.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Mobile Deed Books, Probate Court Record Division,  
Mobile County

2. Secondary and published sources:

Glennon, John F., and Rosemary Glennon, Where Time  
Bears Witness to Sound Building, Mobile: First  
National Bank, 1935.

Nineteenth Century Mobile Architecture, An Inventory  
of Existing Buildings, Mobile: Mobile City Planning

Commission (Unpublished manuscript to be published 1972).

Prepared by Linda Carroll  
Student Historian  
August 29, 1966

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## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a fine example of a local mid-nineteenth-century country house, a "Creole Cottage", built on a large wooded site. It is of relatively modest scale, sturdy, livable, and devoid of ostentation.
2. Condition of fabric: The house is generally very sound. The chimneys have developed several major cracks and the rear sill and siding have deteriorated and settled, along with the kitchen wing.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The rectangular main section consists of one-and-a-half stories (high attic) and measures 46'-4" (five-bay front) x 44'-6". A one-story kitchen wing attached on the northwest rear is 28'-3" long and 13'-2" wide.
2. Foundations: The house is constructed on brick piers raised from 1'-10" to 2'-8" above the existing grade.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The house is a frame construction with clapboards applied directly to the studs and painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: First-floor framing consists of 8" x 6" beams and 2" x 11" joists with an average spacing of 2'-0". Second-floor structural system was not accessible. The attic floor is framed on 2" x 4" joists. 1' x 9'-11" rough-sawn sheathing, spaced approximately 3" apart, is carried on 2" x 5" roof rafters. Square nails are evident on the underside of the sheathing, where a former slate roof was attached.
5. Porches, stoops: A wooden gallery extends across the front of the house. Large square Tuscan posts, which taper to the top by approximately 1½", support the roof and there is a

wooden railing with square balusters. The ceiling is  
coffered paneling. The former rear porch between the  
house and the low kitchen wing is now enclosed. Modern  
concrete steps are found at both entrances.

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6. Chimneys: There are two high exterior brick chimneys on each of the east and west walls. Those toward the front are wider, to accomodate second-floor fireplaces.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The central entrance doorway on the south front consists of a simply-framed opening containing a six-panelled wooden door flanked by two posts with moulded capitals and narrow side-lights of three lights over a solid wooden panel. There is a low seven-light transom over the opening. Framing at the head of the door indicates that the existing door is not original. The door from the hall to the rear porch is also six-panelled, with the middle panel glazed. These two doors match the interior doors.
  - b. Windows and shutters: All windows have very plain trim. The floor-length windows on the south front are double-hung wooden sash with six-over-twelve lights (12" x 16"). All other main windows on both stories are double-hung wooden sash with six-over-six lights (12" x 16"). In the attic gables and also on the kitchen wing, there are diamond-shaped openings; that on the kitchen wing has four lights and is hinged on the lower right edge. All windows except the latter have adjustable wooden louvered shutters. In the attic openings, there are fixed louvers.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The roof is gabled with a 10" on 12" pitch, covered with asphalt shingles.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: There are narrow eaves on the front gallery.
  - c. Dormers: There are three gabled dormers with thin pilaster-like trim on the south front and three on the north rear. The rear central dormer is wider than the others.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The first floor consists of a central hall

flanked by a double parlor on the west and two rooms on the east. The rear porch has been enclosed, and leading from it on the west is a single-room wing. On the second floor, there are two rooms on each side of the central hall, the enclosed stairway being offset from the hall.

2. Stairways: At the rear of the central hall, six risers and a landing lead to a doorway and a reverse single flight which is enclosed. Inside the doorway, a door leads down to a small exterior flight to the rear porch. The stairway has been altered at the landing.
3. Flooring: Flooring throughout is wide pine boards, pegged.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings of the main section are painted lime-and-horsehair plaster. Walls and ceilings of the service wing are beaded tongue-and-groove boards.
5. Doorways and doors: All interior doorways have simple architrave trim; the doors are 1 3/4" thick and have six panels. The lower intermediate rail is 13 1/2" wide, mortised and tennoned into the stiles, as are the other rails. A pair of large sliding doors in the double parlor also have six panels and measure 8'-6" x 10'-0".
6. Special decorative features: There is a drawn plaster moulding which creates a cove in the double parlor. The ceilings of these rooms are also centered by plaster medallions of concentric circles.
7. Notable hardware: At the front entrance, the bell is inset into the door. The only other notable hardware is the "Z"-shaped strap hinges on the shutters.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: All rooms on the first floor have fireplaces with cast-iron grates with marble mantelpieces. Those in the double parlor are white; in the other two rooms, the marble is dark red. On the second floor, the two front rooms have simple wooden mantles with cast-iron grates.
  - b. Lighting: There are no original fixtures in the double parlor, although a Tiffany lamp hangs in the north room. On the second floor, gas chandeliers have been converted to electricity in the two front rooms only.



D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is located on the north side of Old Shell Road, facing south, and is set back from the road.
2. Landscaping: The present entrance drive is from the street up to the west side of the house. It does not appear to have been paved. The extremely large lot (350' x 600') is covered with a grass lawn and has many magnificent oak trees (planted c. 1842), some with a spread of at least 70'. Magnolia trees and native shrubs are also plentiful.
3. Outbuildings: There was a large barn and servant quarters on the rear of the property, but neither exists today. Away from the house to the northeast are the remains of a well house. It appears to have been a rectangular brick structure, with full-height rectangular openings on all sides filled with wooden lattices. The four corners are now approximately 2'-0" above grade, and are constructed of hand-made bricks. The circular brick wall in the center also exists.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins  
Supervising Architect  
National Park Service  
July 15, 1966

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as a cooperative project during the summer of 1966 between the Historic American Buildings Survey and various agencies, organizations, and individuals of the City of Mobile. The Historic American Buildings Survey supplied the project supervisor, Woodrow W. Wilkins, and three draughtsmen, Carl J. Rosenberg (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Michael R. Foil (Auburn University), and Lowell K. West (University of Kentucky). One draughtsman, Elbert L. Coleman (Alabama A & M), was provided by the Mobile Housing Board, which agency administers urban renewal. The services of an additional draughtsman, James Eley, specifically designated as an architectural student from Auburn University, were made possible by contributions from numerous local architects and businessmen. The Historic Mobile Preservation Society, in agreement with the History Department of Springhill College, provided a student historian, Linda Carroll. Office space was supplied by the City of Mobile through the City Planning Commission. Roy Thigpen, a local photographer, was contracted to supply the photographs. All local arrangements were made by the Mobile Historic Development Commission, Mrs. Nancy N. Holmes, President. The project was

edited during the summer of 1972 by Charles A. Herrington, Architectural Historian, in a cooperative effort between the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Mobile Historic Development Commission.